



American Revolution Commission (VA250)
African American Advisory Council (AAAC) Meeting
Tuesday, March 24, 2026 10:30 AM
Fort Monroe, Virginia
Building 75 (110 Pratt St.)
Meeting Minutes (DRAFT)

Call to Order and Welcome

The Honorable Senator Mamie E. Locke, PhD - Chair

Senator Mamie E. Locke called the meeting to order at 10:31 a.m. and welcomed both in-person and virtual attendees. As Vice Chair of the VA250 Commission she highlighted an agenda that would explore the importance of ongoing community engagement initiatives, particularly Juneteenth and African Landing Day, as well as programming unique to local committees throughout VA. Following her opening remarks and greetings to participants and first time attendees around the room, Senator Locke invited Carly Fiorina to provide remarks.

Remarks from National Honorary Chair

Carly Fiorina

Carly Fiorina began by thanking Senator Locke for her leadership on the VA250 Commission and expressing appreciation to all attendees for their participation in the African American Advisory Council (AAAC). She provided a leadership update, noting recent changes intended to reinforce the organization's commitments and improve execution of expressed priorities. Fiorina reviewed key foundational decisions made by VA250, including operating independently from national efforts, positioning Virginia as a national leader, prioritizing education that tells a comprehensive and inclusive story, engaging the entire community, and striving to inspire a broader season of civic renewal.

She acknowledged past confusion regarding coordination with partners and emphasized renewed efforts to improve communication and engagement. Fiorina addressed concerns stemming from a previously communicated funding pause for 2026, noting that the grantmaking process has since been reopened in partnership with the Virginia Tourism Corporation, the Department of Historic Resources, and other entities. She reaffirmed that all partners remain committed to ensuring a successful and inclusive 2026 commemoration.

Fiorina highlighted major "America. Made in Virginia." signature events designed to elevate Virginia's national leadership role: a national gathering of Tribal Leadership will focus on civic renewal and tribal sovereignty; programming will take place at Colonial Williamsburg in April 24-25th 2026, convening tribal leaders and prominent national figures, including Supreme Court Judge Neil Gorsuch. Additionally, African Landing Day is a nationally and globally significant event that will illuminate the contributions and history of African Americans in the making of America. Fiorina noted a nationally televised Fourth of July program from 8:00–10:00 p.m., with a confirmed national broadcast partner to be announced shortly.

Fiorina concluded by underscoring the opportunity to unify the nation through storytelling and civic engagement. Senator Locke thanked her for her leadership and noted the upcoming Commemorative General Assembly session on October 7, marking the 250th anniversary of its convening following the Declaration of Independence.

Introductions

The Honorable Chief Diversity Officer Sesha Moon, PhD – Commonwealth of Virginia – DEI Officer

Dr. Sesha Moon introduced herself, and the DEI Office of the Governor, and expressed enthusiasm for her involvement with the Advisory Council. She highlighted key initiatives aligned with the Governor's priorities, including plans for a Juneteenth activation at Capitol Square and a proclamation recognizing 100 Years of Black History Month presented by the Governor to descendants of Dr. Carter G. Woodson and the organization he founded the Association for the Study of African American Life and History.

Dr. Moon presented the JXN Project film initiative, *Declarations of Independence*, bringing historical figure Abraham Skipwith, a patriot formerly enslaved by President Thomas Jefferson, with significant history in Yorktown, VA, and who established one of the first free Black households in Jackson Ward. Moon outlined upcoming events, including screenings, a grand opening at St. John's Church, and collaborations with historic sites and universities such as Norfolk State University. Forthcoming programming includes a "Feast of Reason" event with Monticello and further screenings in Richmond and New York.

Local Committee/Commemorative Partner Updates:

The Honorable Delegate Delores McQuinn

Delegate Delores McQuinn provided an update on Richmond's VA250 planning efforts. Cohosted by McQuinn and Mayor Danny Avula in Jackson Ward in February, which brought together community leaders to reflect on the past, present, and future of the city. The gathering fostered open dialogue, with participants emphasizing the importance of truth-telling, including difficult aspects of history, and identifying ways faith communities can support civic engagement and healing. Delegate McQuinn highlighted the historical milestone of October 22, 1867, when African American men were first granted the right to vote.

Dr. Andrea Douglass – The Jefferson School African American Heritage Center – Executive Director

Dr. Andrea Douglass shared updates on the 100th anniversary of the Jefferson School African American Heritage Center and a recent exhibit African Americans in the American Revolution curated by genealogist Dr. Shelley Murphy. The exhibit drew from pension records and historical documents to highlight overlooked narratives of Black patriots, including those who served in the Culpeper Minute Men. Plans are underway to expand the exhibit into a traveling program for broader community engagement.

Connie Harshaw – Let Freedom Ring Foundation – President

Connie Harshaw presented on the 250th anniversary of the Historic First Baptist Church in Williamsburg. She provided an update on the African American Heritage Trail and the opening of a Heritage Center, noting some delays due to local leadership transitions but confirming progress toward a soft launch. Harshaw described a series of commemorative events scheduled for October, including dedications, performances, and an international day of worship and healing featuring invited speaker Reverend Raphael Warnock of Ebenezer Baptist Church/Georgia State Senator.

Harshaw discussed broader reconciliation efforts, including the reinterment of remains discovered in the Kingsmill area and a planned international apology event involving Michael Curry. Harshaw emphasized the importance of ensuring that institutional acknowledgments are meaningful and substantive.

Melinda Gainer – AMC250 – Cofounder

Melinda Gainer discussed Hampton250 initiatives supported by the American Music Collective (AMC250), including a multi-day series of Juneteenth events at Hampton University, Fort Monroe, and Mill Point Park. These events aim to revive the spirit of the historic Hampton conferences by fostering dialogue across political and cultural perspectives. Programming will include concerts, intellectual discussions, health initiatives, and community engagement activities, with an anticipated attendance of over 30,000 participants also engaging Sail250.

Strategic Communications

James Warren – Share More Stories - Founder/Consultant

James Warren introduced the SEEQ Oral History Platform, emphasizing the importance of capturing and preserving personal and community stories through a virtual database across the Commonwealth. Participants are invited to write a narrative or record a video following discussion prompts regarding freedom, independence, and other historically relevant themes. He highlighted the platform's role in increasing engagement, strengthening representation, and ensuring that diverse narratives are included in the VA250 commemoration.

Travis Young – Cousin – Founder/Consultant

Travis Young presented on Freedom Forward Communications partnership with VA250, Fort Monroe Foundation, and Djimon Hounsou Foundation, activating exploration of the history of the American Revolution and making America healthy initiatives. This campaign builds upon America. Made in Virginia and emphasizes the importance of grounding commemorative activities imagery, storytelling, and lived experiences that resonate and are rooted in authenticity.

Spotlight on VA250 Signature Events

Bill Schermerhorn – VA250 – Sr. Advisor

Bill Schermerhorn provided an update on the July 4th celebration at Colonial Williamsburg, noting that planning is underway for a nationally broadcasted event. The program will feature performances, storytelling, and a community choir, highlighting diverse narratives and emphasizing civic responsibility as a core theme.

Eola Dance – VA250 – Sr. Advisor

Eola Dance discussed statewide Juneteenth initiatives and the development of African Landing Day programming. All are encouraged to list Juneteenth events on the VA250 landing page. Dance and Fort Monroe Authority CEO, Scott Martin invited all to the April 24 opening of the African Landing memorial at Fort Monroe, designed as a reflective and immersive experience connecting African and American histories. The memorial incorporates symbolic elements tied to Angola origins of first Africans in VA and includes participation from VA Tribe, the Angolan Embassy, and descendant organizations. Invitations are being extended to national prominent leaders, more details to come.

Other Business and Adjournment

The Honorable Mamie E. Locke, Chair

Senator Locke announced plans to establish a national advisory group and emphasized the growing importance of African Landing Day as a statewide and national commemoration. She noted that the next meeting would take place following the Full Commission meeting currently scheduled on April 21, but likely to change. Please anticipate an AAAC meeting in May. The meeting was adjourned at 12:45 p.m.

Advisory Council Members Present:

The Honorable Mamie E. Locke, *Chair, Senate of Virginia*

Carly Fiorina, *National Honorary Chair, VA250*

Connie Matthews Harshaw, *Board President, Let Freedom Ring Foundation, First Baptist Church*

Patrice Lewis, *Government Affairs Manager, Gentry Locke Attorneys*

Rita McClenny, *President & CEO Virginia Tourism Corporation*

The Honorable Deloris McQuinn,

Delegate of Virginia

Dr. Cassandra Newby-Alexander, *Professor of Virginia Black History and Culture, Norfolk State University*

Phyllis Terrell, *Director of Communications, Fort Monroe*

Dr. Vanessa Thaxton-Ward, *Director, Hampton University Museum*

James Warren, *Founder and CEO, Share More Stories*

Guests of the Council Present:

Dr. Andrea Douglass, *The Jefferson School and Heritage Center*

Melinda Gainer, *AMC250*

Dr. Shameka Gerald, *AMC250*

Jelsen Innocent, *Cousin*

Gaylene Kanoyton, *Virginia NAACP*

Scott Martin, *Fort Monroe Authority*

The Honorable Sessa Moon, PhD, *Office of the Governor (DEI)*

Max Plank, *Djimon Hounsou Foundation*

Aaron Whittington, *Fort Monroe Authority*

Travis Young, *Cousin*

VA250 Staff Members:

Eola Dance, *Sr. Advisor - African American Advisory Council*

Jeremy Martin, *Project Manager, VA250 Mobile Museum Experience*

Bill Schemerhorn, *Sr. Advisor - VA250 Event Designer*

Erin Smith, *Program Coordinator, VA250 Mobile Museum Experience*

Reggie Tupponce, *Sr. Advisor - Tribal Leadership Advisory Council*



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Executive Summary

Major Highlights from the AAAC Meeting:

- Reaffirmed Virginia's leadership role in the 250th commemoration, with a strategic focus on inclusive storytelling, civic renewal, and national positioning.
- Grantmaking process for 2026 reopened with strengthened coordination across state agencies and partners to ensure successful program delivery.
- Elevated African Landing Day and Juneteenth as cornerstone statewide and national commemorations, with significant cultural, historical, and global engagement.
- Announced major signature events including Tribal Leadership convening, nationally televised July 4th program, and African Landing Memorial opening at Fort Monroe.

Sen. Mamie E. Locke (Chair)

- Called to order at 10:31am and adjourned at 12:45pm, the discussion emphasized communications and community engagement as central to VA250 success.
- Programs highlighted Juneteenth statewide and African Landing Day as priority commemorations.
- Announced plans to establish an African Landing Commemoration national advisory group to expand reach and coordination.

Carly Fiorina (National Honorary Chair)

- Reaffirmed Virginia's national leadership role in the 250th commemoration.
- Confirmed reopening of 2026 grantmaking in partnership with state agencies.
- Outlined major signature events including a Tribal Leadership convening 4/24 - 4/25 at Colonial Williamsburg and the national July 4th broadcast.
- Emphasized improved coordination, communication, and inclusive storytelling.

Dr. Sesha Moon (Chief Diversity Officer)

- Planning a Juneteenth activation at Capitol Square aligned with the Governor's priorities.
- Highlighted JXN Project film, the film Declarations of Independence, and associated initiatives and upcoming screenings exploring the life of Abraham Skipwith including Jackson House.
- Emphasized partnerships with universities and cultural institutions.

Del. Delores McQuinn

- Reported on Richmond convening focused on truth-telling and civic dialogue.
- Highlighted role of faith communities in healing and engagement.
- Elevated historical milestones tied to African American civic participation, such as voting.

Dr. Andrea Douglass (The Jefferson School and Heritage Center)

- Shared updates on 100th anniversary programming and recent exhibition.
- Highlighted use of pension records to surface exhibition created by Dr. Shelly Murphey of Black patriots.
- Outlined plans for a traveling exhibit available for interested institutions..

Connie Harshaw (Let Freedom Ring Foundation)

- Updated the group on First Baptist Church 250th anniversary and Heritage Center progress.
- Outlined reconciliation efforts including reinterment and international reconciliation events.
- The discussion emphasized the importance of meaningful institutional acknowledgment.

Melinda Gainer (AMC250)

- Presented Hampton250 Juneteenth programming across multiple sites and partners.
- Projected engagement of 30,000+ participants choosing to view Sail250 from Hampton and explore the African American
- Highlighted integration of music, dialogue, and education initiatives, including youth.

James Warren (Share More Stories)

- Introduced SEEQ oral history platform for statewide storytelling.
- Encouraged public participation to capture narratives on freedom and independence.
- Positioned platform as key to representation and engagement between now and July 4th.

Travis Young (Cousin)

- Presented Freedom Forward communications strategy, a partnership with VA250, Fort Monroe Foundation, and Djimon Hounsou Foundation.
- Emphasized authentic storytelling rooted in lived experience.
- Compliments messaging of “America. Made in Virginia” and elements will be available to commemorative partners .

Bill Schermerhorn (VA250)

- Provided an update on the signature and broadcast July 4th event, highlighting the focus on storytelling, performance, and civic responsibility.

Eola Dance (VA250)

- Invitation to promote statewide Juneteenth programming and attend the African Landing Day.
- Was joined by Scott Martin (FMA CEO) and Aaron Whittington (FMA Events) to announce the April 24 grand opening of African Landing Memorial Plaza at Fort Monroe.
- Highlighted global and descendant engagement including Tribal Nations and Angolan Embassy.

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